

## VILLAIN 351

Chapter 351: The Forgotten Rank

—The Tea Party—

In the witch's splendid garden...

Simon Manus sat, staring with curiosity at the lady before him.

Beatrice's homunculus sat quietly, her head bowed, her expression utterly void of life.

Simon's curious gaze turned into a smile the moment the doll moved again. Beatrice returned—exhaling a long, tired sigh.

"Welcome back, my lady sorceress... or should I say, exalted high-rank demon?"

Simon grinned, showing his teeth, while Beatrice casually waved her hand, dismissing the formalities.

"Just say what you came to say."

"Nothing special, my demonic lady. I must admit—I didn't expect your true body to be a demon. I imagined you to be a hybrid at most. But you've surpassed even my wildest expectations!"

Beatrice stared at Simon Manus, who chuckled curiously.

"You know, you're the first creature on this earth unaffected by the truth of what I am."

"Affected? Why would I be?"

"Aren't you a Hollow? You're supposed to be our slave like the rest, aren't you?"

"Naaaaah."

Simon Manus made a disgusted face and immediately denied it.

"When did I ever say I follow filthy, grotesque creatures like demons?"

"..."

"My passion lies with a completely different species! More beautiful... more perfect!!"

The Puppetmaster, Simon Manus, openly revealed his twisted artistic desires before Beatrice, who grew more intrigued by the madman sitting before her.

"To speak so freely of your loyalty before a high-ranking demon... I didn't make a mistake inviting you to this tea party, Simon. Kihihhi."

"Don't get the wrong idea... Rank 17. I'm only interested in your doll—not your cursed real body."

Though his words were nothing short of insulting, Beatrice didn't seem the least bit offended.

"I hate my real body too. Every time I'm forced to use it, I lose control over all my homunculus ... they freeze completely, just like this poor one did."

Controlling that many bodies simultaneously wasn't just difficult—it was supposed to be impossible.

Yet Beatrice had done it. Still, if she ever engaged in battle or something similar using her real form, she would inevitably lose control over them all.

"You didn't do anything weird to my precious body while I was away... did you?"

Beatrice asked suspiciously, and Simon looked away without saying a word.

"..."

"..."

"You filthy bastard."

"Forget that nonsense, Beato. Tell me—do you still wish to continue this little witch's game of yours?"

"Of course."

Beatrice answered instantly, as if the question didn't even warrant thought—only deepening the curiosity in Simon's heart.

"But Beato... you have the strength to crush every intruder currently on this continent. And finding them wouldn't even be difficult for you.

So I don't understand .. why not just face them and kill them with your true body, instead of playing this childish game with them?"

Simon had been curious about Beatrice's motives for some time now.

Why would an awakened being of SS+ rank go to such lengths... for a group of weak children?

At first, Simon assumed that something was preventing Beatrice's true body from acting—but she shattered that expectation the moment she revealed herself in full power as a high-ranking demon.

And yet, he couldn't help but question why.

The answer came from Beatrice herself.

"Oh, about that..."

With a sweet smile, the witch replied,

"It's a secret."

"I figured you'd say that," Simon sighed, shaking his head, regretting even entertaining the idea of getting a straight answer from the trick-loving witch beside him.

"Don't be like that. I have a goal I need to accomplish—otherwise, I wouldn't have come all the way to this remote place called Earth."

"I suppose you're right."

Beatrice nodded.

"Also, if I were to go there with my true body... my intuition tells me something terrible would happen."

Manus raised an eyebrow at her words.

"And how exactly would that happen?"

"I don't know. But I suspect it has something to do with that strange boy I mentioned last time."

"Ah... something-Starlight, was it? Frey Starlight?"

"Yes. He's... unique."

With powers that defy logic—things she had only seen among the top 10 upper demons, or perhaps a few of the higher ones—Frey had displayed abilities no human should possess.

Using her sharp intellect, Beatrice came to a troubling realization: nothing she saw could be explained logically.

There was only one conclusion that could make it all make sense.

"There's a hidden force behind him."

Someone—or perhaps more than one.

Frey Starlight was hiding countless secrets.

And Beatrice, ever greedy, wanted to uncover them all.

"I really look forward to it... the next Witch's Game."

In that moment and in that place, everything had already been decided—and Frey and his companions were destined to continue stumbling through the hellish game the witch had prepared for them.

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—Stormveil District—

A region like a fortress built amidst the desert, Stormveil was constantly struck by storms and sand whirlwinds.

And yet, it stood tall—unyielding—against everything that came crashing into its massive walls.

Stormveil was unlike any of the other Lower Bloodlands.

Its sheer size rivaled that of the Empire's great cities, and its population was just as vast—the streets were never empty.

Of course, no matter how large a city grew, the nature of the Bloodlands never changed.

Even with its relatively better conditions, Stormveil was plagued by the same horrors:

Cannibalism. Debauchery. Murder. Bloodshed. Public sex in the streets.

If you ventured deeper into the city, you'd find alleys crawling with its most desperate and deranged—people sleeping on the streets, fighting each other daily without pause.

Among them sat a lone, cloaked youth, dressed entirely in black, with only a sliver of white hair peeking out from beneath his hood.

Though he sat alone, none of the Ultras dared come near him—not after he'd beaten a dozen of them senseless the previous days. He even killed a few with his bare hands.

The black-cloaked figure remained still for most of the time, staring into nothingness and mumbling incomprehensible words under his breath.

Then, after a long stillness, he finally moved.

"So... Maekar lost this time."

After using third-person pov for quite a while to monitor his sister, Ada...

Frey stood up from his spot, having learned the outcome of the battle between the Empire and the Ultras in the Bay of Shezclar.

After that defeat, many names had gone missing—besides Frey and his scattered companions.

Frey realized he could no longer expect any backup. But what puzzled him most were the battle's developments—especially its ending, and the sudden appearance of another high-ranking demon.

"Rank 17... Beatrice."

Frey questioned aloud.

"Was that a coincidence?"

The same witch he had personally killed... and now, this demoness who called herself Witch Beatrice.

"Of course not. There are no such coincidences in this world."

He didn't know how .. but he was sure there was a connection between them. And that only deepened his fear.

"A wicked witch capable of manipulating an entire empire... and now she's watching us."

Regret consumed him as he realized he had revealed all his trump cards to her.

He had made a terrible mistake.

"If she comes back... the same tricks won't work again."

Frey cursed under his breath as he walked away.

'Just who... is the witch named Beatrice?'

The only high-ranking demon that should exist on Earth in this timeline was supposed to be Rank 19—Astaroth.

And yet ... there she was.

Beatrice, destroying everything.

From the very beginning, he hadn't even known she existed.

Even though he had written the story himself, along with all 72 high-ranking demons, he had only planned to use a handful of them in the actual plot.

Rank 17 wasn't one of them.

Which meant... he wasn't even familiar with her name—because he had never created it in the first place.

"I need to find the others... quickly."

Hidden from sight...

Frey Starlight moved once more, searching for his friends, using the third-person player pov as his only guide ... one full week had passed since they'd been separated.



The real game was about to begin.

Chapter 352: Darker than black (1)

What separates life from death?

What distinguishes a human from a beast?

In truth, the differences are clear and well known.

But when it comes to a cursed land ruled by the law of the jungle—where a chosen few are favored while the rest are left to rot in hell—none of that matters.

Here in the continent of the Ultras, the law of the jungle reigns supreme.

Brutal battles to the death are the norm...

And only the strong survive.

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"Don't stop! We don't have time to fight!"

"Let me rip them apart, damn it!"

Surrounded by a large group of enemies...

Two men charged forward, breaking through anything in their path as the chase grew more intense.

Danzo led the way, clad in his full-body silver armor, punching through building walls one after another with sheer force, followed closely by Ragna, wielding a massive spear nearly his own size.

On the other end, the Ultras had been relentlessly attacking them for days.

"Come at me, you bastards!"

Winds surged violently around Ragna's spear as he unleashed slash after slash, slicing through the pursuers and painting the ground with their filthy blood.

Though he had cut down many, more and more kept coming ever since he and Danzo fell into the trap set in this desolate Ultras city.

Ragna insisted on fighting, but Danzo dragged him along by force, refusing to let him stop.

"I told you not to stop running, you idiot!"

"Let's finish them off!"

"That's exactly what they want fool!"

As the siege closed in, Danzo unleashed his aura, swelling his muscles to the limit. Explosive power surged through his silver dragon armor.

"Light Maneuver: Sky-Shattering Fist!"

He struck the solid ground of the city with devastating force, enhanced by his dragon armor, causing a massive explosion.

The impact triggered a quake felt throughout the city, leveling houses and burying the Ultras who had surrounded them.

Using the smoke and dust as cover, Danzo and Ragna vanished, leaving the Ultras circling a giant empty crater.

It didn't take long before they started screaming in rage, realizing their prey had escaped.

A chaotic uproar broke out—some even began attacking each other.

"Find them!!"

"Search everywhere!!"

The Ultras scattered like rabid dogs, desperate to reclaim their fleeing prey.

But the prey hadn't gone far...

In fact, Danzo had immediately dashed into one of the buildings, hiding inside with Ragna, right beneath the noses of their pursuers.

Now safely tucked inside the basement of the old structure, the moment the danger passed...

Danzo punched Ragna straight into a wall, fury blazing in his eyes.

"What the hell is wrong with you?! Fight? Wipe them out? Who the hell do you think you are ?!"

Grabbing Ragna by the collar and lifting him, Danzo seethed at the first companion he'd found since the chaotic teleportation.

Ragna was equally furious.

"You want to run? Then run by yourself!"

He broke free from Danzo's grip, yelling recklessly despite the risk of being discovered.

"Didn't you hear what those bastards said?! Are you pretending to be deaf now?! Tell me, Danzo!!"

"..."

Danzo stayed silent as Ragna continued.

"It was Lawrence, Danzo... That bastard Lawrence is their leader! That's the name of the man who killed my father!"

Danzo instantly remembered the imperial raid on the Ultras—the day Isaac Cloud, Ragna's father, was killed.

Later, they had been told it was a monster named Lawrence behind it all... A name he now heard again from their pursuers' mouths.

Since that moment, Ragna had gone completely insane. But unlike him, Danzo remained rational.

"So? What are you planning to do?"

"Kill the son of a bitch, of course!!"

"And how exactly will you do that?" Danzo asked coldly.

In response, Ragna stabbed his massive spear deep into the ground, sending out a raging windstorm that shook the room.

"I have my father's spear... Wynnyd, the Spear of Storms. I'll kill that damn bastard with it!"

One of the five legendary spears—Wynnyd, ranked S+—left to him by his father.

Ragna was consumed by vengeance, but Danzo grabbed him by the back of the head and forced him to face him eye-to-eye.

"Listen to me!"

Suppressing his raging friend with force, Danzo spoke impatiently.

"Who do you think fought that Lawrence bastard on the day of the raid?"

"..."

"My father! And your father! My dad, wearing this cursed silver dragon armor—and your dad, wielding that damned Storm Spear you keep bragging about!"

"Two fully armed S+ rank warriors couldn't take him down! What do you hope to achieve with your pathetic strength?!"

Danzo couldn't stop himself from punching Ragna as he shouted:

"Revenge is fine—hell, it's the best! But what you're planning isn't revenge... it's suicide, you damned bastard!"

Panting heavily, Danzo tried to stop Ragna from making a reckless move.

He understood. If his own father had died that day instead of Ragna's, perhaps he wouldn't have been able to hold himself together either.

But still... he had to stop him.

"Get a grip, man. Is this what your father would've wanted? For you to die foolishly after him?"

"And what the hell would you know?!!"

BOOM!

Danzo punched Ragna again, grabbing him tightly.

"What I know is that you'll die if you go. And since I'm here, I won't let that happen—even if I have to beat you senseless and drag your unconscious body with me. So either you stop this madness... or I'll bury you here and now!"

In response to Danzo's threat...

Ragna clenched the Storm Spear, Wynnyd, his jaw tight, glaring furiously at Danzo, who stared back with a dead serious expression.

But the clash never happened.

Ragna loosened his grip.

Danzo let go of him.

Defeated and frustrated, Ragna sank to the ground, lowering his head.

"What am I supposed to do, Danzo? My father's killer... he's so close. Closer than ever before. I might never get this chance again."

All of this—every twist and turn—had been an accident. If not for that trap, their feet would never have stepped on this cursed continent.

But the world has a way of becoming small. And now, Ragna stood within reach of the man who stole his father away.

"What am I supposed to do now?"

He kept asking.

Until Danzo answered.

"Live, Ragna. Live."

Removing the Silver Dragon Armor, Danzo sat down in front of his friend.

"I'm sure that's what your father would've wanted. Live, grow stronger, and then seek your revenge again—on your own terms."

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That was the last exchange between them.

They fell into silence, lost in their thoughts.

Both stayed hidden, waiting for the danger to pass before they moved again.

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Ten days into the Continent of Ultras...

It hadn't been long, but it was enough time for a lot to happen.

Especially when the elite class's supplies had run out at a terrifying pace. They weren't all monsters with strange bodies that didn't hunger or tire.

Humans had their limits—and some were already breaking.

But those two were definite exceptions.

"Hey, found anything?"

Daemon Valerion asked as he searched one of the Ultras' administrative buildings he'd stumbled upon.

"Stop asking and focus."

"I really need to do something about that tone of yours."

Ghost was also searching, scanning the entire place while ignoring the piles of corpses around them.



After reuniting, the two had formed an unlikely team, breaking into this place in hopes of finding something—anything—that could help them return home.

But the results were disappointing.

"Nothing useful. It's all about cursed blood transfusions and experiments I don't understand."

Daemon cursed, kicking a metal cabinet and sending it flying.

"We'll have to move."

Ghost had found nothing either.

"You mean look for the others?"

Ghost nodded.

"Right."

"Honestly, most of those idiots are dead weight that'll only slow me down... Ghost Umbra, are you really sure you want to go looking for them?"

Daemon walked calmly toward Ghost, studying him.

"Aren't you an assassin? I thought assassins worked alone."

He didn't mind having Ghost on his team—he was strong, useful, reliable.

But the same couldn't be said for the rest.

If it were up to Daemon, he'd form a squad with only those he deemed worthy—and leave the trash behind.

But even he wasn't crazy enough to do something like that openly.

Hoping Ghost shared the same mindset, he was caught off guard when the silent killer suddenly raised his arm, revealing a glowing tattoo—the same one the witch Selina had marked him with.

"One of our comrades is nearby. Let's go find them."

Ignoring Daemon's words entirely, Ghost focused on his priority, giving no regard to anything else.

Especially now that Selina's mark was glowing again...

The very same mark she used on them during the teleportation.

Once they were warped, the mark acted like a radar—glowing brighter as elite class members drew closer to one another.

That was how Ragna met Danzo before, and now how Ghost had met Daemon.

The latter sighed in defeat, having long given up trying to change Ghost's mind.

"Whatever you want..."

Chapter 353: Darker than black (2)

Quietly, both Ghost and Daemon exited the building.

Night had fallen. The streets were completely deserted—eerily so—but the eerie silence didn't faze the duo at all.

Ghost lifted his gaze toward the moon that lit the sky, the same moon seen from all corners of this world.

He found himself wondering about the others.

"You said assassins work alone, Daemon Valerion."

Ghost's voice broke the silence, and Daemon halted, staring at him with a blank expression.

"So what?"

"You're wrong. Assassins never truly fight alone."

Ghost kept walking, voicing thoughts he rarely shared aloud.

"An assassin always assesses the situation and chooses the most logical path ... the one that offers the best chance of survival. The simple truth is, I saw no advantage in staying alone with you, Daemon Valerion."

"..."

Daemon didn't say anything. He knew Ghost was right.

"But no need to worry. The purge you want might just happen on its own."

Daemon was momentarily surprised by how accurately Ghost had read him.

What Daemon truly desired was a team made up only of the strong—no deadweight, no burdens.

And it seemed that team would assemble itself naturally, just as Ghost implied.

The Continent of Ultras would ensure it .. one way or another.

With a crooked grin, Daemon expressed his admiration.

"I wonder how you can speak your mind so easily... Ghost Umbra."

But Ghost didn't really care.

The number of people he wanted to save in this world was small—painfully so.

Especially for someone like him, who had grown used to burying his comrades.

Nothing really moved the assassin anymore.

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Far from the rebellious duo of Ghost and Daemon...

A lone girl wandered the alleys of the Ultras, hiding herself as best she could.

From time to time, her body would glow faintly with a soothing green aura, healing her fatigued body little by little.

This was how the Saint Candidate, Emilia Atarax, had survived these past few days.

With no food or water left, she had no choice but to resort to this method to stay alive.

Especially here, in the barren lands of the Ultras—no animals to hunt, no crops to harvest, not even water to drink.

The only meat that sustained these people was human flesh, and their only wine was filthy demon blood.

Emilia was already nearing her limit. Alone, scared to even move in search of her comrades, she had hidden away.

"Lord... grant me strength to overcome this trial..."

She prayed with all her heart, hoping her god would show her a path—or that one of her companions might find her.

Anyone would do.

Anything but this crushing, maddening solitude that left her unable to even sleep. The young girl suffered in silence.

Even her holy power had nearly run dry.

But just as she finished her prayer, she heard it ...

A child's cry in the distance.

The sound of a small boy weeping.

Emilia hesitated for a moment, afraid to leave her hiding place, but she gathered her courage when the crying didn't stop.

"This must be a sign from the Lord..."

Believing it to be an answer to her prayer, she followed the sound immediately.

She moved through alley after alley until she reached a dark corner.

There, a child—no older than five—sat sobbing uncontrollably.

Emilia covered her mouth in horror as she saw the boy's arms had been severed, his body tied to a chair and left to bleed out.

She rushed to him, pouring what little holy power she had left into his body, desperately trying to heal him.

"Hold on!"

But no matter how hard she tried, her power was too weak. His wounds didn't close. The boy's crying only grew louder.

"Lord... what should I do?!"

Emilia was at a loss, searching for anything—anything—to help the boy.

Then, as she turned around, she froze.

Right in front of her, just inches away, stood a man—his eyelids dry and crusted, his skin peeling to the bone—staring at her with grotesque curiosity.

A twisted smile stretched across his face the moment he saw Emilia's features.

"I knew it!"

He shrieked, mad with joy, as he yanked back her black cloak, revealing her green hair and the face she'd tried so hard to hide.

"I knew you'd come!!"

The deranged man screamed, reaching out with a trembling hand.

But Emilia, frozen in terror, released a burst of holy energy, blasting him back.

And yet...

It didn't harm him at all.

"Stay away!!"

From her frail hands, Emilia unleashed another beam of holy power, shattering the terrifying man's body with force.

But not enough to kill him...

"Damn you!! I cut off my son's hands just for you! Why are you acting like this?!"

The man screamed in madness, and Emilia's fear only grew—along with the certainty that she had no choice but to kill him.

But she had never been a fighter to begin with. Her strength had faded, worn down by days of hunger and exhaustion.

Then out of nowhere...

A second man appeared. Then a third. A fourth. Crawling in from the edges of the narrow alley...

Between the boy who had cried until his tears and blood ran dry,

and the men whose skin was blistered and clung tight to their bones...

Emilia resisted, summoning a barrier to keep them at bay.

Those men—more demon than human—threw themselves at the barrier with mindless ferocity, drooling as they stared at her.

They pounded against it until their arms and legs bled.

Tongues out. Eyes glowing red.

Emilia watched her barrier begin to crack.

"My God..."

The fissures spread, one after another...

"My God!!"



Tears streamed down her face as her body trembled involuntarily at the sight of those creatures battering her last line of defense.

Now... there were dozens of them.

Then—without warning—

Emilia fell to the ground, struck by the one soul she hadn't seen as an enemy.

The child, the boy with severed hands, leapt onto her and bit down on her left shoulder with animalistic force, sinking his teeth deep into her flesh.

Emilia, who had always fought from a distance—far from pain, far from suffering—was not used to feelings like this.

So, all she could do was scream in agony, forgetting the barrier that had protected her until now.

And just like fragile glass... the shield shattered.

The monsters surged in.

Like beasts, they swarmed over Emilia's fallen body, tearing off her clothes in an instant, pinning her down with brutal force, snapping the bones in her arms and legs, refusing to let her escape.

When the wave of blinding pain hit her—pain unlike anything she had ever known—Emilia had no choice but to scream until her voice broke.

From every direction, the men piled onto her like rabid animals, even fighting each other in their frenzy to get to her.

And finally ..

The Saintess Candidate felt a searing, unbearable pain from below, unable to comprehend that she had already been violated.

In that moment... a single phrase echoed through her broken mind:

"If they get the chance, they'll take turns raping your corpse, one after the other..."

With her body shattered and monsters raping her again and again...

Emilia, who could no longer scream or cry, found herself asking:

After endless hours ..

'Why is this happening to me?'

She had been obedient. Devout. Faithful.

She had done everything right. Lived a righteous life.

The bishop once said... the faithful would never suffer.

So why?

Why was this her end?

Her holy power didn't save her.

No one came.

In that dark alley...

She was violated again and again until she died in that cursed corner of the world.

And as expected—those monsters continued what they started, even knowing their prey was dead, raping her corpse and dragging all meaning of life and morality down with it.

In a shadowed corner of this damned land...

Another tormented soul fell.

Chapter 354: A different kind of human.

Upper Bloodlands – Caelid.

Here, in the heart of the continent, at its very core...

Under a sky stained crimson by the slowly setting sun...

A bizarre and inexplicable sight stood— a city built as the capital of this cursed land.

Deserts and barren wastelands surrounded it from every side, sealing it off completely. Yet the moment one neared Caelid, the desolation would inexplicably transform into verdant, vibrant terrain, so alive that even the air felt different.

Between life and death, there existed a thin, invisible barrier .. an unseen line that separated the Upper Bloodlands from the filth beyond.

There was no comparison between the chaotic cities where the elite class wandered and this flourishing capital known as Caelid.

The city stood tall with skyscrapers and advanced structures, brimming with vitality and elegance.

Its people looked like nobles from the Victorian era, strolling with grace through the clean streets built just for them.

This was Caelid—home of the Upper Blood. Those rare humans who had managed to assimilate demonic blood and were chosen to leave the forsaken hell they were born into.

It was terrifying .. how a minority came to possess everything millions outside that barrier could only dream of.

In a secluded corner of Caelid stood a large, dark fortress no one dared approach. It looked like a relic from the medieval era.

This was the residence of the oldest among the current Lords of the Ultras—Gavid Lindman.

He stood now behind a fragile glass window, staring at the strange phenomenon occurring on the other side.

The room he was in was the most secure chamber in the entire fortress, forged from an incredibly tough grey metal...

And yet, that metal was melting—dissolving at a terrifying rate under the effect of the black flames that engulfed the space.

Those flames were erupting from the body of a single young man, barely eighteen years old...

A youth who could no longer even scream. He simply sat collapsed, slowly devoured by the dark fire consuming him from within.

His Moonlight Sword lay beside him, dropped when its wielder could no longer hold on.

In that moment, the masked figure known as V looked utterly hollow, surrendering to everything as the fire crawled over his skin.

He didn't even register Gavid as the man shattered the glass and tore through the wall, striding into the blaze.

V lifted his head, staring at the approaching lord. His red eyes were lifeless. The black flames surged at Gavid immediately—

But he didn't stop.

He walked through them, ignoring his burning body. For those flames were no ordinary fire.

Gavid didn't hesitate. As soon as he reached V, he launched a thunderous punch into the boy's face, sending him stumbling deeper into the sea of fire his own body had birthed.

"What do you think you're doing, Vinny?"

Gripping his empyrean tightly, enduring the searing heat, Gavid shouted with a voice laced with aura:

"Is that it? Is that all you've got to offer?"

He returned the Moonlight Sword to V—slowly.

"We are humans rejected by this world. We've borne the sins of our fathers... and their fathers before them. Born into this dark continent, we've lived every second between life and death."

"With filthy blood in our veins, we belong neither to the humans who built their empire and cast us aside, nor to the demons who treated us as experiments and enslaved us."

He grabbed V's face—even as his hand burned to a crisp, he refused to let go.

"So what are we, then? Just slaves, living and dying according to the whims of beings that despise our very existence?"

As he poured his beliefs into him, Gavid's body erupted with a powerful aura that repelled the flames, forcing them back, his grip on V tightening.

"Astaroth is not our king. Not our ruler."

"A filthy demon won't decide our fate. We will."

"The Empire is no better than us. They are not more human than we are."

"They won't rule us. They won't decide for us. We will!"

Gavid's words reached V .. something lit up again in his crimson eyes.

With difficulty, the tortured youth muttered faintly:

"...My Lord... Lord Lindman."

"Fight it! Make it yours!" Gavid roared louder.

But V trembled.

"I can't... I can't! He's too strong!"

He wept. He could no longer suppress the fire.

"I can't do what you and Lord Dragoth did..."

"Look at me... Vinny of Sparda..."

Obedying, V stared at Gavid once more, whose eyes had turned completely black as he pushed his power to its absolute limits.

"You're the first. The first to receive a contract like this... an SSS ranked pact."

"The power of Marvas, the Fifth Highest Demon!"

A being said to wield flames hot enough to burn the sun itself.

"We've served long, waited longer. What you'll see and endure will make you want to throw your life away. But remember this...

You are the master of your own fate."

"This power that's killing you, the fire burning your soul, eating you from the inside out... it will become yours."

"Bow your head if you must, hide your strength if you need to—

Endure everything. But never let anyone else decide your fate."

"Don't lose yourself... V..."

Placing the Moonlight Sword in his hands, Gavid Lindman slowly stepped back, unable to resist the searing flames any longer.

As for V, with a long exhale, he summoned the aura of the Moonlight Sword—an aura that devoured all others—and began containing the inferno his body had produced.

The masked figure managed to gather his will to fight once more... even inside the black hell that was consuming him.

"We were born here, on the continent of the Ultras, fated to bear the sins of our ancestors and live in a world that cornered us from every side."

Only the Ultras can understand the Ultras... No one else ever will.

In the heart of that despair, each of them lived their lives in their own way.

Chapter 355: The Gathering

– 10 Days Since the Elite Class Was Scattered –

After countless hours wandering alone, following the glowing mark of the witch Selina on their hands—the only clue they had left...

The elite students fumbled their way through obstacle after obstacle, desperately searching for one another.

Phoenix Sunlight was by far the most active, running like a madman in every direction, determined to find the others.

His desperate struggle led him to a few of them—but not all.

Now, gathered inside a primitive Ultras tent they had stormed earlier, Phoenix sat in the center, staring at the faces around him.



Closest to him, of course, were his two cousins—Scarite and Ivan Sunlight—the twins he was lucky enough to find first, thanks to their proximity after teleportation.

The next ones he'd found were another pair: the Church's golden boy, who looked grim and silent, and the granddaughter of the former headmaster—Lara Croft.

Lara hadn't stopped looking at Snow since he appeared. Just when she was struggling to survive, he had shown up—while casually annihilating an Ultras camp she had taken refuge in.

From how wildly Snow had been running around, it was obvious he was searching for something.

But the cold reaction he gave her made it clear—he wasn't looking for his friends. His goal was something else entirely... something he refused to explain.

Not far from them were three more figures: Daemon, Ghost, and Dawn Polaris, whom they had found while exploring the surrounding area.

The strange thing about Dawn wasn't just that he had survived on his own... but that he had found food in the middle of that chain of deserts—without a scratch or any real hardship.

When asked how he did it, his answer was vague.

"I was born with a useless talent... that finally proved useful."

With a sorrowful smile, Dawn Polaris mentioned the odd gift he'd carried since birth.

It was more of a power than a talent—something the others never even believed could be real.

\*The Last Survivor: No matter where he goes, no matter who his enemies are... the last survivor will be the one who lives to tell the tale of the dead.\*

Alongside his weapon talent, Dawn had been born with this strange ability... one that somehow always let him survive, no matter the situation .. like a plot armor..

Even he couldn't believe it.

But recent events... had started to prove otherwise.

And that's what made Dawn wonder:

"Am I really supposed to be happy with a power like this?"

To survive while everyone else around you dies...

Perhaps that was a fate worse than death.

With such grim thoughts, Dawn isolated himself from the rest.

Nearby, Danzo and Ragna had also survived, having successfully escaped the ambush they'd been caught in.

Phoenix continued counting the survivors, eventually arriving at the last group of girls he had found:

Seris Moonlight, Sansa Valerion, and Adriana Heigeforn—found together, with Seris and Sansa being the first to meet, and Adriana joining them later.

And finally—Selina, the witch—appeared out of nowhere the moment they were all gathered.

She had been the one who placed the magical marks on them in the first place, so she had hidden herself carefully until they were all in one spot. Once enough of her aura had gathered in a single location, she teleported to them effortlessly.

Not long after Selina, Prince Aegon Valerion arrived as well—alone and unharmed—completing the list.

Phoenix, his expression darkened, finally spoke.

"Only fourteen people...?"

A sharp pain pulsed in his head at the thought that more than five students had likely already perished.

And then came Selina's words... the ones that crushed all remaining hope.

"I marked every single one of you. The magical mark doesn't disappear unless under very rare conditions—most notably, the death of the person it's attached to."

After a pause, with all eyes turning to her, Selina declared:

"I can feel every living bearer of the mark. Right now... only sixteen of them remain on this continent."

Fourteen were present. Phoenix was the fifteenth.

Which meant ..

Everyone slowly began to understand.

"Of those not here..."

"Only one is still alive."

With that final line, Selina shattered any remaining hope that the rest of the students had survived teleportation.

Somewhere across the continent of the Ultras...

They had all died alone.

All of them... except one.

News like this only made the mood among the elite students grow darker and darker. The death of their comrades had become a bitter pattern ..

and this time, they wouldn't even have the chance to bury them properly.

That's if there were bodies left at all.

"Selina... can you teleport to the last student's location?"

Phoenix asked, his face weary.

Selina shook her head.

"I'm afraid not. The condition for my teleportation spell is that a significant amount of my aura must already be present at the location I want to travel to. That condition was barely met when all of you gathered here..."

"I see... but you can at least pinpoint where he is, right?"

This time, Selina hesitated even more before responding.

"That's not possible. The mark only reacts to the location with the largest and nearest cluster of signatures, so..."

"Only he can find us... is that what you're saying?"

"Yes... I'm truly sorry."

"It's alright. You've done your part."

Phoenix placed a hand on Selina's head, forcing a faint smile.

"The responsibility for everything that's happened falls on me."

Even if he had no choice, given the situation they were thrown into,

it didn't change the fact that he was the strongest among them—and their teacher.

"I'll find the last survivor myself. Everyone else stays here."

"There's no point, Professor Phoenix. This is an entire continent, remember? How are you going to find him?"

Aegon was the one to speak this time—the only person who could challenge Phoenix openly.

"The last student will be trying to reach us, since he can feel our presence. All I have to do is sweep the surrounding area until I find him. Who knows—maybe I'll get there in time to save him."

Now that so many students had already died, Phoenix was desperate to save whoever was left—by any means necessary.

"There's no need to go, Professor Phoenix. The last survivor is already known."

It was Daemon Valerion who stepped forward.

"It's Frey Starlight. Without a doubt."

Phoenix said nothing.

Because deep down... he believed the same.

"Daemon's right," Snow added, breaking his silence at last.

"I know what Frey is capable of. If he unleashes everything he has, there aren't many Ultras who can actually kill him."

Snow's voice was steady, confident.

"He'll reach this place sooner or later. So instead of wasting energy searching for him, I suggest we stay here—while the strongest among us heads out to investigate the portals."

Naturally, Snow had nominated himself. He had no intention of staying idle in one place.

Phoenix, however, saw right through him.

"Sorry, but I can't risk losing another student. Everyone stays here. If anyone's leaving—it's me."

Snow's hand moved to his sword. He could no longer hide his frustration.

He was seriously considering forcing his way through.

He took his first step,

but Lara Croft—who had clung to his arm—stopped him.

"Don't... Snow."

Having lived with him for so long—ever since her grandfather adopted him—Lara could easily anticipate his actions.

But this time, Snow wasn't in the mood for her.

With a swift motion, he flung her aside effortlessly.

"I don't have time to waste here."

Somewhere on this cursed land...

was someone he had searched for, longed to find, and desperately wanted to kill.

Now, at long last, he had a lead.

He couldn't let this opportunity slip away.

He knew he was strong enough.

And here, deep in enemy territory, Snow didn't mind unleashing the full wrath of the War King Form without restraint.

Even if it consumed him in an endless thirst for blood...

as long as it meant killing his enemies, he would be satisfied.

With defiant resolve, Snow took his first real step—intending to break away and go off on his own.

Chapter 356: The last survivor

"Void ste..."

Before he could activate his skill, he was immediately stopped ..

by two figures appearing at the exact same moment.

"There's no point in what you're trying to do... Snow Lionheart."

"I'm getting real tired of babysitting you suicidal bastard's. Can't any of you just sit still for once?!"

Ghost stood directly in front of him.

Danzo had appeared behind, wrapping him in a physical lock with his overwhelming strength.

Snow found himself completely trapped.

"Let me go."

"Not happening."

Danzo smirked, tightening his grip.



"I can hold this skinny body of yours all day long."

"I don't want to hurt you both..."

Snow spoke coldly as his body began to emit more and more aura.

Ghost and Danzo both knew just how strong the Church's champion could be.

But neither of them backed down.

"That's enough, Snow Lionheart."

A hand landed on Snow's shoulder—appearing out of thin air.

Phoenix had stepped in to end the battle before it began.

"Go ahead. Try. But tell me, Church Hero—do you really think you can overpower everyone here on your own?"

Now, face to face with Phoenix...

Snow stood frozen in place as conflicting thoughts clashed within his mind.

"Set your priorities straight, Snow Lionheart... don't make a decision you'll regret for the rest of your life."

He said nothing, but slowly withdrew his aura. At last, he yielded—forcing Danzo to release him.

"A choice I won't regret..."

Sitting down quietly, unmoving, Snow couldn't help but question whether any of the options before him were truly the right one.

Deep within his heart, he felt that no matter what he chose, regret would follow.

For in a land like this, there was no such thing as a "right" or "wrong" answer—

not when they were lost in a hostile continent, with no clue how to return home.

But that was about to change.

Just as the tension finally began to ease and silence fell once more...

Seris Moonlight stepped forward, holding a strange-looking object in her hands.

"About the portals... and a way home,"

she said,

"I think we may have found something useful."

Together with Sansa and Adriana, Seris presented the artifact they'd discovered when they were first teleported here.

Phoenix took the object—which resembled a metallic orb—and examined it curiously.

"Is this what I think it is...?"

"A magic map!"

Selina spoke up immediately upon seeing it.

"These kinds of artifacts often contain miniature constructs—used to identify places and chart locations."

"Can you activate it?" Phoenix asked.

Selina nodded eagerly.

"I can. It only needs a little magic to work."

Infusing her aura into the orb, Selina unlocked the intricate magical seals. The orb reacted instantly, glowing softly as a series of light circles emerged and stabilized.

A massive three-dimensional projection burst forth into the air above them—

a living map, fully rendered in vibrant detail.

Every elite student present stared up in awe, the full expanse of the Ultras Continent now reflected in their eyes.

"The entire continent... it's all here."

The map was incredibly detailed—showing even cities and landmarks.

But Selina's focus narrowed on one particular feature:

White spires scattered across the map in key locations...

"Teleportation gates..."

Their only path out of this hellish land now stood clear.

There were many gates, but most of them were located deep within major cities—cities of the High Blood, naturally.

What caught Selina's attention, however, was one gate near their current location.

An ancient portal, hidden within an isolated mountain region.

"We can escape..."

Selina muttered without realizing, a glimmer of hope spreading across the weary faces of the elite students.

"If we can reach that gate... I can bring us back home!"

She pointed to the portal, which was roughly a hundred kilometers away, buried in the mountains.

Finally, the students had a clear direction, instead of aimless wandering.

"Well done, Seris Moonlight. But how exactly did you find this artifact?"

Phoenix asked, not fully convinced it was mere luck.

"Credit goes to Adriana. She discovered it before we met."

Seris gestured toward Adriana, who shrank in place as all eyes turned to her.

"I-It was just luck..."

Adriana mumbled nervously, but Phoenix shook his head.

"Be proud of yourself, Adriana. That 'luck' may have just saved all of us."

He then turned back toward Selina, who was still analyzing the map.

"What's the likelihood this map is fake?"

"Impossible," Selina replied.

"There's a magical signature embedded in the artifact—it was created long ago. There's no way it's a forgery."

Reassured by her words, a sense of cautious optimism returned to the group.

"Then let's move! We've wasted enough time already!"

Scarite exclaimed, unable to contain her excitement to leave this cursed place.

But Sansa quickly cut her off.

"Move? To where?"

The princess—silent for most of the conversation—chose this moment to speak.

"There's still one person who hasn't arrived. Did you forget? We're not leaving without him."

Her words were firm. Scarite frowned.

"Frey Starlight..."

Everyone believed that the final survivor could only be Frey.

Some weren't thrilled about staying behind just for one person, but their voices were too weak to challenge the decision.

"The princess is right. We're not moving until he gets here."

Phoenix's declaration left no room for argument—especially when even Prince Aegon himself said nothing in protest.

And so, everyone chose to wait for Frey.

But Selina—more than anyone—couldn't bring herself to say a word.

She simply stared at them in silence.

She was the only one who knew the truth.

But recklessly speaking it aloud... wasn't an option.

Frey Starlight might already be dead.

And he wasn't the final survivor.

She had seen it with her own eyes—

Frey had forcibly interrupted his own teleportation, staying behind alone, surrounded by the Ultras army... and the witch who accompanied them.

As a result, he didn't carry her mark.

He had erased it himself.

Frey was powerful ..

but not powerful enough to survive that.

In other words, whoever the last marked survivor was...

it wasn't Frey Starlight.

That was what Selina wanted to say.

But she kept it to herself—until the very end.

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The final survivor.

The one bearing the last mark...

Wasn't a boy.

But a girl.

A lone figure who found herself trapped in a region under constant attack.

Clana Starlight.

The one everyone believed was waiting for rescue.

With a body battered and broken, riddled with deep gashes, her once-white hair now stained crimson with blood ..

She had burned through all five of her stars, draining every last drop of aura as she unleashed the full extent of her Stardust Style just to survive.

But no matter how many enemies she cut down...

more kept coming.

Her sword had lost its edge, no longer able to hold up under the relentless assault.

Surrounded by yet another wave of Ultras who had pursued her for days on end—

Clana had finally reached her limit.



"So this is the end...?"

The endless chase had prevented her from ever reaching the others.

Though the mark had pointed to their location—

they were far too far away.

Now, as dozens of rabid Ultras reached for her—

Clana raised her sword to her neck.

She had chosen to take her own life ..

rather than be raped by the hands of monsters.

Accepting her fate.

Ready for death.

She was prepared to die ..

but in the end, everyone else died instead.

Collapsing in place, unable to stand ..

Clana's eyes widened in disbelief at the storm of dark slashes that erupted all around her, tearing the Ultras to pieces in an instant.

Like a phantom...

he appeared ..

in the center of the blood-drenched battlefield, staring down at her.

"Are you alright?"

Among all the elite students...

he was the only one without a mark.

"Frey..."

And just like that. .

the last two survivors of the elite class stood reunited.

Chapter 357: The Highblood (1)

— Frey Starlight's POV —

It's been ten days since I was separated from the Elite Class.

The past days had been eventful. The war between the Empire and the Ultras had officially begun after the battle of the Shizclar Bay—a battle that ended with the Empire's defeat.

Left with no clue, I was forced to wander aimlessly through enemy territory in search of my classmates. During this search, I passed through many of the primitive colonies of the Lower Blood.

I witnessed their grim reality firsthand, how their harsh environment and the lives they were forced to live had turned them into monsters wearing human skin.

The Ultras Continent, home to millions of humans, was nothing but a living testing ground for demons who exploited them to the fullest.

Humans are an adaptive species .. capable of surviving any environment they're placed in. Which is why they made the perfect subjects for such horrific experiments.

After living among them and slaughtering hundreds over these past days, I'd grown sick of it all.

And just when I thought I'd have to continue like this for a while longer... I met her.

"Clana..."

Holding her in my arms as I dashed across the mountains, I searched frantically for a proper shelter.

Clana Starlight's breathing was shallow, her face red with a high fever.

All of it—because of her injuries.

A deep wound on the right side of her abdomen. I assumed she was stabbed there—whatever pierced her had gone clean through and exited her back.

There was another wound on the right side of her chest, though not as severe.

On top of that, her body was covered in dozens of cuts and bruises—clear signs of continuous beating.

To have survived ten days in that condition, at her current level of strength, was a miracle in itself.

But now that I was here, I wouldn't let her die that easily.

"Frey..."

Barely, Clana opened her eyes from time to time, trying to speak.

"Don't talk. Focus on stopping the bleeding... hold on as long as you can."

"Just leave me... Huff... I won't survive wounds like these."

"..."

I didn't respond.

I knew it was already too much for her. Maybe she was just hallucinating from the fever as her body fought off the death slowly creeping into her heart.

Seeing her like this only reminded me how different we were.

If it were me who had sustained these same wounds, they would've healed on their own.

We're both humans, both from the same bloodline—the Starlight family.

And yet we were so vastly different.

"I won't let you die... not that easily."

After almost an hour of high-speed movement through the mountainous terrain, I finally found the perfect hiding spot—a small cave I located thanks to my Hawk Eyes.

Without hesitation, I entered.

"The Ultras won't find us here."

Once I confirmed the place was safe, I gently laid Clana on the ground and tore away parts of her clothing to expose the wounds, which had already started to rot.

"Stay with me..."

I kept her conscious for as long as I could, gathering a massive amount of aura in my left hand until it glowed with a vibrant purple light that lit up the entire cave.

Unleashing my SSS-rank aura without holding back, I placed my hand on Clana's abdomen, cauterizing her wound and allowing my power to flow into her body.

Clana couldn't suppress her screams—she felt her entire body burn as her veins lit up with the same purple glow.

"Focus, Clana!"

I continued channeling aura into her without restraint, helping her reactivate her fighting style and reignite her five stars.

For that to happen, she needed to stay awake—to properly circulate her aura.

The process took far longer than I expected. By the time I finished, the sky outside had already darkened.

And as soon as I stopped pouring my power into her, Clana lost consciousness, bleeding both sweat and blood throughout the ordeal.

But at least, I'd successfully revitalized her body .. she no longer lacked aura.

Next, I cleaned her wounds and stitched them shut.

I never studied medicine in my life—my experience came solely from watching my father treat my injuries when I was younger.

So what I did could barely be considered medical aid. But I hoped it would be enough to keep her alive for now... especially since humans in this era were far more resilient than those before the concept of aura.

Thankfully, her breathing slowly stabilized. And I finally let out a sigh of relief.

Once I was sure she was out of danger, I covered her with the cloak I'd been using for stealth and retreated to the cave's entrance.

Up here, surrounded by the mountain range and under the stars that lit the gloomy sky... everything was calm.

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When Clana finally woke up again, morning had arrived.

It marked the start of Day 11—still lost in the lands of the Ultras.

Clana barely managed to lift her upper body, gripped by a sharp wave of migraine.

Yet despite that, she found herself able to move again—so smoothly, in fact, that she was stunned by how well she'd recovered.

Which naturally led her gaze toward me.

"You're finally awake... How are your wounds?"

I initiated the conversation myself, hoping to ease the awkward tension that had built between us ever since I treated her. Thankfully, she responded quickly after examining her body.

"I'm fine... thanks to you."

Still unable to fully comprehend her recovery, Clana kept inspecting herself as if trying to confirm she wasn't dreaming.

"These injuries... they weren't something that could heal in a day. Not even ten. How did you do it?"

"I didn't do anything special. First, I cauterized your wounds using my power, then reactivated your aura circulation. Finally, I cleaned and stitched the wounds."

I explained the whole process like it was the easiest thing in the world, while Clana looked at me, visibly puzzled.

"Reactivating aura circulation... Is that even possible?"

"Isn't that what the church does? Their so-called divine healing?"

Clana opened her mouth to argue, comparing what I did to the sacred powers of the church... but she quickly closed it again.

"You're incredible, Frey... I'm sorry for being such a burden. And... thank you, for saving my life."

Her sudden words of gratitude came with a warm smile—one completely different from the playful ones she used to flash at me before.

Her smile, combined with a system window popping up in front of me, made me raise an eyebrow—especially after I saw her affection points.

"There's no need to thank me. Anyone else from the elite class would've done the same."

I skipped past the formalities and moved on to the topic that truly mattered.

"More importantly, Clana... you have Selena's mark, right?"

As soon as I asked, her expression shifted in confusion.

"Of course. Don't we all have it?"

She lifted her right arm, revealing Selena's magical signature glowing faintly—indicating that it was still active.

"Why are you asking about the mark, Frey? Don't you have one too?"

"..."

I didn't know how to tell her that I had erased mine—that I never got transported with them in the first place.



But given our current situation, I realized there was no point in hiding it.

"I don't have a magical mark."

Chapter 358: The Highblood (2)

Clana's expression slowly shifted the moment she heard that.

"That's impossible. Then how—wait... you didn't escape that city?!"

I nodded, and she lost it.

"No way! You stayed there alone against that army?! Wait—don't tell me... you survived that?!"

Truth be told, I was planning to face them all on my own... but it never came to that.

"That army was fake. An illusion created by that witch."

"An illusion?"

"Yes... just a mirage."

"So everything we've been through... was for nothing?"

One revelation after another, Clana clutched her head again as her migraine returned.

That desperate teleportation, which everyone thought was the only way to survive, turned out to be meaningless...

In fact, it had led to the deaths of many students—a truth I'd confirmed using the third-person pov to spy on their last meeting.

Clana didn't take it well. And just seconds later, she began coughing again—her body crying out from hunger and thirst after depleting her supplies.

Seeing that, I pulled out everything I had, handing over all the food and water I'd stored so far.

I gave her my full share, untouched, but she refused at first.

"I can't accept this... what will happen to you if I take all of your rations?"

"I don't need them."

I replied instantly and pushed them closer to her.

My body was unique. Surviving for a few weeks on aura alone wasn't that difficult.

Clana couldn't argue anymore. She drank and ate with desperation.

"But Frey... how did you find me without a mark?"

After the teleportation, the witch's mark was our only clue to finding each other. The only way to locate the others.

"Finding you was just luck. Pure coincidence."

I'd been searching nonstop for ten days, passing through multiple Ultras camps and cities—until I stumbled upon her.

"Just luck, huh?"

"What about you? Why didn't you regroup with the others?"

Now that she was better, I started asking the questions I'd held in for days. This was the first.

"I tried... but I couldn't make it."

Clana sighed, frowning as she recalled the past days.

"What exactly happened?"

"These cursed mountains..."

She pointed outside with her finger and began recounting everything.

"This mountain range stretches for hundreds of kilometers. It's a nightmare land in itself—filled with nightmare creatures that appear the deeper you go..."

I listened intently to what Clana had to say.

It was the first time I'd heard of another Nightmare Zone besides the ones I already knew.

"Crossing the mountain range is practically impossible," she said. "Even if we somehow managed to survive all the nightmare creatures along the way, it would take far too long. But... I did find a path that lets us bypass everything safely."

"There's a secure passage—an arcane corridor that allows for instant teleport from this side of the range to the other."

"But the problem is... that passage is a military base. An Ultras stronghold. The moment I got near it, they were already waiting. They chased me for days—you know the rest."

She supported her explanation by sketching a rough map in the dirt. She drew the jagged outline of the mountain range and a thin line through the middle that represented the passage.

"We'll have to find a way around it," she said flatly. "Selena's mark points to the other side."

But I cut her off.

"We're not going around the mountains. We're going straight through the front gate."

"Excuse me?"

Clana stared at me like she'd misheard, her voice raised in disbelief.

But I stood by what I said.

"We're going through that base—through the gate itself. Even if it means tearing it down on top of them."

"Frey... do you hear yourself? That place is crawling with them!"

"I know. But we don't have a choice if we want to reach the others."

After all, they've already found a way back home.

If we waste time trying to circumvent the mountains, we might miss that one chance entirely.

So I chose the direct route.

"We'll go as soon as you're fully recovered."

I said it with conviction.

Clana scowled automatically. The trauma of the past few days was still written all over her face—and now I was asking her to walk back into battle.

But we had no choice.

"If anything happens... Clana, I want you to leave the fighting to me. If you have to run.. then run. I want you to always put your survival first, understood?"

"..."

She didn't say a word.

She just nodded, hesitant and silent—especially with me standing that close.

And with that, our path was set.

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It took Clana another 24 hours to recover enough to move again.

That night, we set out toward the passage she'd mentioned.

We wore black cloaks that covered us from head to toe for disguise, especially Clana—who I wrapped in every spare piece of clothing I had, leaving only her eyes visible.

After all... even if the Ultras didn't know she was an enemy, they'd still flock to her on sight.

"We'll try to sneak in. If possible, I want to avoid fighting."

"Okay..."

Infiltrating the lower blood caste wasn't difficult. Their defenses were weak, and most of them were barely stronger than fodder. I was confident we could get through.

It took only minutes to reach the entrance of the passage.

I expected to find the same kind of weak fortifications I'd seen all across the primitive Ultras lands—but I was met with something else entirely.

Nestled between the mountains stood a massive gate—fortified with magic cannons and dozens of guards stationed above.

The gate opened now and then, letting some Ultras in and out.

But what caught my attention wasn't the architecture or the overwhelming presence of the fortress.

It was the Ultras themselves.

Those auras... their vibrant expressions... the way their bodies radiated explosive strength. They were nothing like the lower-blooded cannon fodder I'd fought the past few days.

I scowled.

"These aren't lowbloods."

They were entirely different. Not even comparable.

These were the real strength of the Ultras—the ones who had forged demonic contracts. The ones with demon blood running through their veins.

"The Highbloods..."

I muttered unconsciously, just as Clana stepped back in shock.

"That's impossible! I was here just a few days ago. There were none of them!"

She was visibly shaken. Realizing the full power of what now stood before her, she stumbled backward instinctively.

"Let's fall back."

She wanted to retreat—but I grabbed her hand before she could.

She turned to me, confused.

"We keep going."

"But—!"

"Trust me."

I tightened my grip and moved forward, pulling her along.

"Frey... stop!"

Step by step, we approached the massive gate—until we came fully into view.

If they wanted to, they could bombard us with the arcane cannons perched above.

But they didn't.

Which meant they hadn't realized yet... that we were enemies.

As we got closer, two guards stationed outside moved into view—towering men with massive swords strapped to their backs, their aura radiating with suffocating force.

"Frey, stop!!"

Clana's voice cracked, panicked—especially after sensing their S-class auras.

I saw the fear in her eyes.

But I didn't stop.

Face-to-face with the Highbloods...

I was ready to enter the gate.



## Chapter 359: Ultras Maneuvers (1)

— Kalavan Passage —

The narrow strait that split the Nightmare Mountain Range in half—fortified with a powerful stronghold.

The fortress itself was more than just a checkpoint; it was a full-fledged Ultras city, typically managed by the lower blood castes. But today was different. Today, the elite of the Ultras had taken control.

In front of the gate stood two towering guards, their strength easily estimated to be S-rank or higher by Frey.

Behind them were additional sentries and arcane cannons stationed atop the walls for extra protection.

In other words, breaching this stronghold was an exceptionally difficult task—and even if one succeeded, it would instantly alert all Ultras in the area of an intruder.

But none of that stopped Frey.

Dragging the terrified Clana behind him, he came face-to-face with the sentinels .. who already had their hands resting on the hilts of their massive swords.

Their eyes scanned him, assessing the hooded figure who deliberately kept his face hidden.

And just when they were about to strike, Frey bowed in a strange, ceremonial fashion—his right hand pressed to his heart, while his left was raised in an unfamiliar salute.

Clana blinked in surprise, puzzled by the gesture.

But the guards didn't share her confusion. In fact, his actions made them hesitate.

"Who are you?!"

Their suspicion remained, but that salute alone was enough to delay their swords.

It was a gesture only used by a rare few—those from one of the Four Great Highblood Cities.

"One of Lord Gavied Lindman's Seven Swords. William of Caelid."

The moment those words left Frey's mouth, he released a fraction of Balerion's aura—just enough to push his presence into S+ rank for a moment.

It was all he needed to be taken seriously.

Seeing their reactions, a faint smile formed beneath his hood.

'So they're not from Caelid...'

That confirmed it—they weren't from Gavied Lindman's capital. If they had been, they would've recognized he was an impostor.

Still, that wasn't enough to fully convince them. So Frey played his trump card.

"I'm here under Lord Lindman's orders. The mere fact that this damn gate isn't open already is reason enough for me to demand both your heads. Don't you think?"

He let go of Clana and stepped forward. The hesitation in the guards' expressions was obvious ..but they still didn't grant him entry.

"I'm a reasonable man, as you can see," Frey continued. "I know you're just doing your job, especially with enemies lurking among us. So... I suppose I should offer you some kind of guarantee, shouldn't I?"

In the blink of an eye, he pulled something from his robe and held it up before their eyes.

Their expressions darkened instantly. Both dropped to one knee in perfect unison.

"We offer our deepest apologies to the High Sovereignty!!"

Their voices rang out in sync, while Clana stood in stunned silence.

Frey, however, showed no sign of surprise.

"I don't need your apologies. Just open the damn gate."

"Yes, sir!!"

One of the guards jumped to his feet, channeling aura into his voice as he shouted:

"Open the gate!!"

The command traveled up the walls—and within seconds, the massive doors began to creak open for Frey.

The guards stepped aside to let him through.

"Let's go."

Frey called out to Clana, who was still frozen in place, struggling to comprehend what had just happened.

She quickly ran after him, afraid to fall behind.

Together, they passed through the gate—just before it closed shut behind them as quickly as it had opened.

Inside, they entered a city built like a fortress. The structures clung to the mountainsides, while the lower levels featured everything from the typical lowblood tents to full military installations.

They quickly blended in with the crowd—which, to Clana's growing concern, included a terrifying number of Ultras from the high bloodline.

Still clinging to Frey, she couldn't hold back anymore. She felt like she'd been asking endless questions lately—but how could she not, when Frey kept doing things that defied all logic?

"What the hell did you just do?!"

Frey continued walking calmly, pulling out the same token he had shown the guards earlier.

"All I did was show them this."

In his hand was a black emblem the size of a fist, etched with a blood-red demonic sigil.

Clana scowled at the sight of it.

"What is that?"

"It's a token used by high-ranking members of their hierarchy. I took it off one of them after I killed her."

The emblem's actual name was The Sigil of High Sovereignty. Frey had taken it from Beatrice's corpse after defeating her—it was the only item of value she had on her.

Thanks to his knowledge as the story's author, he'd immediately recognized what it was.

From there, all that remained was to perform the ridiculous salute he'd written long ago and sell the performance—just enough to get them through the gate.

"It was a gamble," he admitted. "If I hadn't had the emblem, they would've made us show our faces—and we'd probably be fighting for our lives right now."

Clana's face darkened at his words. She imagined how close they'd come to disaster .. especially now that they were already inside, with no turning back.

Everything that had happened so far made her want to dig deeper into the man named Frey Starlight.

'How does he know all this? When did he defeat a member of their High Sovereignty? Is he really one of us? Are we even the same age?'

All those questions were on Clana's mind... but she buried them deep in her heart.

'What am I even thinking? He saved my life...'

'Besides, he's the son of the phenomenon—Abraham Starlight. This level of power is expected from someone like him, isn't it?'

She exhaled quietly, steadying her emotions so as not to draw attention.

"I'm glad everything worked out in the end."

"You really thought I'd fight my way through the front gate? Don't be stupid."

'Even though I actually would've, if I didn't have the emblem...'

Frey spoke with a neutral tone, his face still hidden beneath the black mask he wore, but his words didn't reflect what he truly thought.

"Still... you're amazing, Frey. I'm glad I ended up stuck with you."

Clana smiled, sincerely this time, and that alone was enough to make Frey frown again—especially when another system notification popped up before his eyes.

Ding!

Clana Starlight:

Current Affection Points: 80

(Threshold breached — user can now exert enhanced influence using Third-Person Perspective on this individual)

Frey wasn't pleased with what he saw. He wasn't sure when Clana's affection level had gotten so high.

But this wasn't the time or place to deal with it, so he ignored it for now.

"Let's find the teleportation circle and get out of here."

Spending too much time among the Ultras wasn't exactly a brilliant idea. Without wasting another second, he pushed forward into the heart of the pass, with Clana trailing closely behind.

"It shouldn't be far now..."

Kalavan Pass was equipped with a powerful magic circle that allowed people to teleport directly to the other side of the mountain range.

It would've been perfect—if only it had been a teleportation gate rather than a mere circle. That difference alone was the reason it couldn't be used as a true escape route.

"Frey... something's going on up ahead."

Clana stopped, pointing toward the large crowd that had formed in front of them .. clearly, something was happening.

"Let's blend in. Stay close to me, and don't lift your head. Remember, everyone here is highblood."

Frey warned her seriously, and Clana nodded.

Clinging tightly to his arm, the two merged into the crowd, who were all cheering loudly for a group walking through the path cleared ahead of them.

"All hail the High Sovereignty!!"

The crowd roared in unison.

Frey's expression darkened the moment he felt the overwhelming pressure slam onto his shoulders.

He didn't even know where it had come from.

But then, a giant man—nearly four meters tall—passed by them, each step echoing with terrifying weight.

He wore a golden suit of armor that covered his body entirely, while his blazing red hair jutted out from the top like a crown of fire.

Frey's cold, killer eyes grew even colder.

"Lord Godfrey of Aeonis is passing!"

Someone shouted, intensifying the crowd's cheers and confirming what Frey had already suspected.

Chapter 360: Ultras Maneuvers (2)

Godfrey wasn't alone. His entire army followed.

The Ultras, after winning the battle of Shizclar against the Empire, had begun to shift their forces elsewhere. And the first to move was the savage lord himself—Godfrey.

"Frey... could that be?"

Clana asked, barely able to endure the weight of the aura pressing down on her. Frey nodded.

"They're here for us."

The Ultras were starting to take them seriously. The arrival of an army this large confirmed that something massive was about to happen.

What convinced Frey even more was the direction Godfrey and his army were heading—toward the other side of the pass. The same road that led to their companions.

"Something's wrong..."

Why had Godfrey appeared here, now?

Had the Ultras already discovered where their group was hiding?



Frey couldn't suppress the killing intent that surged within him as those thoughts filled his mind.

"Frey?"

Clana clutched his waist tightly—but his eyes continued to glow with that dangerous violet hue.

'I can't risk letting him go...'

Frey began to walk, pushing his way to the front of the crowd, while Clana hurried after him in a panic.

His killing intent grew so sharp and focused that even the massive Ultra lord himself stopped walking—turning his head in Frey's direction.

"I'll kill him here!"

Frey didn't know how far his current power could go if he unleashed everything. But one thing he was sure of—taking down a single lord wasn't out of the question.

He was just about to summon his blades and start the massacre—

—but then he froze.

A new presence burst through the area. A second oppressive aura, just as heavy as Godfrey's.

"What's wrong, Lord Godfrey? Why have you stopped?"

From within Godfrey's army, a new figure emerged—walking calmly from the rear.

He had a body larger than any normal human, wrapped entirely in black bandages like some sort of undead creature.

Crimson-red eyes.

Aura pressure: SS rank.

Gavardiol.

He came to stand beside Godfrey, who didn't say a word. He simply turned back around and resumed walking at the front.

As for Frey, now held firmly by Clana at the waist, he had already withdrawn his killing intent.

"...Another SS rank ..."

Frozen in place...

What irritated Frey the most was the man's appearance—the hulking figure, wrapped in black bandages.

He'd heard of someone like this before. Specifically, during the Temple Raid... exactly one year ago.

That man was Gavardiol.

The one who killed Ghost's older brother.

But there was one major difference: his power.

Back then, Ellen White had said he was no stronger than S rank.

Yet now... he had appeared before Frey as an SS rank monster.

Frey could do nothing but grit his teeth—his opportunity to strike had completely vanished.

"What the hell is going on here...?"

He didn't know much about these new Lords who had suddenly emerged from nowhere.

But the black horn protruding from the back of Gavardiol's head made something click.

"...A half-demon."

Frey muttered, eyes wide, as the truth began to crystallize before him.

Third-generation experiments. Half-demons.

The seal that had already been broken, allowing demons to enter the world again.

These people... were the successful results of those grotesque experiments Frey had seen in the past.

"...It all makes sense now."

Grabbing Clana, he pulled her back—far away from Godfrey and Gavardiol's aura range.

"Wait—where are you going?!"

Clana asked in alarm, but Frey didn't respond.

Lord Mergo, the old man the Empire knew nothing about despite his advanced age...

Gavardiol's leap in strength to SS-rank in just one year...

The explanation was simple.

'It's just like what happened in Londor.'

3 months on that dead planet had equaled just 3 days on Earth.

The same principle applied to the demon world—Helmond.

Time there passed far faster.

That alone explained all the unknowns up until now.

"They all came from Helmond."

Realizing that, Frey grasped the scale of the danger.

Lord Godfrey didn't remain for long—he activated the magic pass and teleported to the other side.

To use the circle, however, a specific key was required.

A key Frey didn't have.

Holding Clana's hand, he pulled her away from the crowd.

"We need to find one of the keys to that magic circle and warn the others—fast."

Otherwise, they'd soon find themselves facing the full Ultras army bearing down on them.

Frey had no leads on where the keys might be. Still, he was determined to find one and escape.

"...Selena would've been able to activate the portal easily."

Clana muttered unconsciously, clearly at a loss herself.

Frey frowned and was about to say something, but a sudden voice called out.

"Hey—you two."

Frey turned.

A strange young man in his twenties stood there, his wild orange hair jutting out like spikes. He stared at them with a grin.

"The way you've been moving around—back and forth like that—you're not from here, are you?"

Grinning wide, flashing his yellow teeth, the spiky-haired man walked toward them with heavy steps.

Frey scowled at being noticed and pushed Clana behind him, facing the man head-on.

"We're all strangers in this filthy place."

He replied in a cold voice.

The man laughed.

What Frey said could be interpreted in many ways—but it was clear enough: most of the highbloods present here didn't actually belong to this pass. It was a place usually reserved for the lowblood Ultras.

"Haha... you're absolutely right. Forgive my rudeness, but may I ask who you are?"

"And why would you need to know?"

"...Curiosity."

The man replied with a grin.

"My name is Draxler from Shizclar. I saw you earlier in the crowd—and I've been watching ever since."

"And why's that?"

Frey asked. Under his clothes, the tattoos on his swords glowed faintly.

He was ready to strike the moment it became necessary.

But Draxler didn't seem fazed by Frey's hostility. He continued to speak with the same light tone.

"Unlike everyone else here—and your cute friend hiding behind you—you're the only one whose power I couldn't gauge. That alone makes me curious."

Draxler took another step forward.

"...So who are you?"

Frey, after evaluating the man, determined that Draxler was at least S+-rank.

Which only made him wonder why someone that strong was wandering around this place alone.

Still, Frey had no time for unnecessary bloodshed. So instead, he pulled out the Blood Emblem of High Sovereignty, revealing it once again to Draxler.

The man's eyes widened for a second before he burst out laughing and dropped to one knee.

"My apologies, Lord of the Sovereign Seat, for not recognizing your rank!"

"There's no need for formalities. Now that you know, step aside."

Frey passed Draxler without further comment, with Clana at his side.

But the strange man wasn't finished.

"Forgive me again, my lord, but..."

He raised his voice slightly.

"Would you, by any chance, be looking for the magic circle keys?"

The moment he said those words, Frey halted in place.

Draxler's eyes gleamed. He knew he was right.

"If that's the case..."

Still smiling—his sharp teeth fully on display—he rose from the ground.

"...Then I think I can help."

Having just mentioned the one thing Frey urgently needed, Draxler had now made himself impossible to ignore.

Frey had no choice but to deal with this strange Ultras man... whether he liked it or not.